

Message Text

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SUBJECT: SOCIALIST PARTY RALLY MILD SUCCESS

REF: BRUSSELS A-52

SUMMARY. SOME 25,000 PEOPLE ATTENDED NATIONAL RALLY ORGANIZED BY BELGIAN SOCIALIST PARTY (PSB) IN BRUSSELS, MARCH 15 TO PROTEST AGAINST TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF BELGIUM'S ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN. SPEECHES BY PARTY'S CO-PRESIDENTS RENEWED ATTACKS MADE ON GOVERNMENT AT MARCH 1 CONGRESS. SIZE OF TURNOUT DID NOT MEET EXPECTATIONS OF ORGANIZERS. SOCIAL CHRISTIANS, HEARTENED BY WEEKEND'S DEVELOPMENTS NOW FORSEE NO NEED TO REVISE COALITION BEFORE SUMMER VACATION. END SUMMARY.

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

1. SOCIALIST PARTY (PSB) HELD RALLY MARCH 15 IN BRUSSELS TO PROTEST AGAINST GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC POLICY, INFLATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT. BUSES CARRIED DEMONSTRATORS FROM ALL REGIONS BUT WET, COLD WEATHER DISCOURAGED HEAVY TURNOUT. PSB CO-PRESIDENT WILLY CLAES IN PRESS CONFERENCE MARCH 13, WHEN PRESSED TO GIVE PREDICTION ON NUMBERS PSB EXPECTED FOR THIS RALLY SAID IF 35,000 PARTICIPATE IT WOULD BE VERY SUCCESSFUL. ACTUAL NUMBER THAT ASSEMBLED AT LOCAL PARTY HEADQUARTERS ESTIMATED BETWEEN 21,000

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(POLICE) AND 35,000 (PSB). ACTUAL FIGURE APPEARS TO BE

AROUND 25,000. AFTER HEARING SPEECHES BY CO-PRESIDENTS CLAES AND ANDRE COOLS PARTICIPANTS MARCHED FOR TWO HOURS IN DRIZZLING RAIN. BANNERS SPELLED OUT SOCIALIST'S COMPLAINTS: "GOVERNMENT EQUALS UNEMPLOYMENT", "DECEMBER 1973: 100,000 UNEMPLOYED, JANUARY 1975: 300,000 UNEMPLOYED" AND "GOVERNMENT EQUALS HIGH COST OF LIVING."

2. IN THEIR SPEECHES BOTH CLAES AND COOLS RETURNED TO THE ATTACK ON GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC POLICY ALONG LINES OF SPEECHES AT MARCH 1 CONGRESS (REFAIR). COOLS CALLED AGAIN FOR FORMATION OF "PROGRESSIVE" BLOC OF THE LEFT WHILE CLAES REPEATED NEED FOR FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURAL REFORMS.

3. SOCIALIST TRADE UNION (FGTB) REFUSED TO PARTICIPATE IN MARCH 15 RALLY. FGTB LEADER TOLD US THIS WAS IN KEEPING WITH STRICT FGTB INDEPENDENCE FROM SOCIALIST PARTY AND FACT THAT PSB MADE PREPARATIONS FOR MEETING WITHOUT FIRST CONSULTING WITH FGTB.

END UNCLASSIFIED

4. COMMENT: WHILE SOCIALIST PRESS HAS CALLED RALLY SUCCESSFUL DEMONSTRATION, SIZE OF TURNOUT WAS A MILD DISAPPOINTMENT TO ITS ORGANIZERS. GOVERNING SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY HAS DRAWN FROM TONE OF CLAES SPEECH THAT HE IS DEFINITELY INTERESTED IN PREPARING WAY FOR PSB REENTRY INTO GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER WITH LINGUISTIC ISSUE NOW COOLING OFF SOCIAL CHRISTIANS SEE NO NEED TO BROADEN OR RESHAPE TINDEMANS COALITION. BARRING UNFORSEEN DEVELOPMENTS, NEGOTIATIONS ON SOCIALIST REENTRY ARE UNLIKELY TO COMMENCE BEFORE SUMMER HOLIDAY SEASON. IN MEANTIME SOCIALIST PARTY WILL CONTINUE TO HARRASS GOVERNMENT BUT CANNOT ALONE POSE THREAT TO ITS STABILITY.
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